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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/14/2028
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PA](#)
SUBJECT: AND THE WINNER IS.... TOO CLOSE TO CALL WITH ONE
WEEK TO GO

Classified By: DCM Michael J. Fitzpatrick; reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Two new polls released April 11 show divergent results just one week before Paraguay's April 20 national elections. A major poll conducted by COIN for leading daily Ultima Hora shows a virtual three-way tie for president, with Fernando Lugo at 34.5 percent, Lino Oviedo with 28.9 percent, and Blanca Ovelar with 28.5 percent of the vote assuming a 65 percent voter turnout rate (similar to 2003's turnout) and with a 2.3 percent margin of error. (Pedro Fadul is in a distant fourth place with 3.5 percent.) The same poll, however, suggests that Blanca Ovelar would squeak out a win if voter turnout is anywhere under 50 percent; the greater the turnout, the greater Lugo's winning margin, with Oviedo pulling ahead of Blanca for second place only if turnout exceeds 60 percent). COIN also notes that Ovelar is the only candidate who has been gaining ground compared to their previous polls. A separate poll (by Ati Snead) reportedly gives Lugo a more commanding 37.1 percent of the vote, and shows Oviedo and Ovelar with 27.3 and 23.9 percent respectively (with Fadul at 2.1 percent). We have less information, however, as to the methodology or credibility of Ati Snead's unpublished results.

¶2. (C) COMMENT: Given Paraguay's notoriously poor polling, and the approximately 9 percent of the population officially still undecided, and the assumption that many here distrust (and thus lie to) pollsters, this could still be anyone's game. The Colorados have not yet completely united behind Blanca Ovelar, and appear to be increasingly anxious about the possibility that they could lose this election (causing increased scheming about how they can steal it). Meanwhile, many Lugo supporters believe they have "already won" the election, and seem disinclined to accept news of their possible defeat. And, per his own inner circle, Oviedo refuses to even consider the possibility of his own defeat. Regardless of the winner, the presence of strong International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) and Organization of American States (OAS) electoral missions should help deter fraud and increase transparency and confidence in the electoral process. IFES and OAS have urged the candidates to exercise restraint in declaring early victory and the press to be responsible in reporting exit polls and early results. Both factors will be critical to maintaining the social and political peace next weekend, and thereafter. END COMMENT.

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